She Who Must Be Loved

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Diana had demanded that Amanda tidy her study, but her feelings for the rebellious witch were perhaps more disorganized still…

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Beyond crimson curtains, pulled near completely closed, the Sorcerer’s Stone glowed softly, suffusing green radiance into the night air. It was only a warm evening, not quite yet summer; but even so the air was stuffy and in the little alcove, separated from the main room by an antique bookcase of first editions and ancient scrolls, the ambience was suffused with sweat and musk. The blankets had been pulled from the bed, leaving only fine cotton sheets; where they heaped, haphazard, on the floor, they were capped with a light scattering of underwear like ashes: dark and light mixed together.

Amanda's fingers moved blindly in the space between the two sweat-slicked bodies, but when they touched the other girl’s hand it pulled away - not sharply like a burn, admittedly, but purposefully enough - so instead she pulled herself up so she could lean against the head board and began to play with the pastel hair that broke, like waves, across the pillow beside her.

“Top of the class again, Miss Cavendish.”

Diana rolled onto her side, choosing to look at the wall rather than the young woman beside her.

“Sexual magic has been a fundamental component of witchcraft for thousands of years.”

A fingertip turned clockwise on the crown of Diana’s head, repeating the slick motion it had made elsewhere, twisting the pale hair into a corkscrew. Amanda gave a little tug, so as not to seem too affectionate, and then let the hair relax, release, and unwind. She ran her free hand over one breast, where five pink streaks, almost claw marks, were slowly fading. Rough fingers - servants’ fingers, Diana sometimes thought - scratched vaguely at it, and Amanda arched her back slightly, recalling the movement of another’s hands and a more refined touch.

“Well, that was one hell of a history lesson then. Feels like tradition demands I’ve a smoke at this point.”

She fumbled on the floor where her wand had fallen, muttered something almost inaudible, and re-emerged a moment later with a translucent blue cylinder between her fingers. She put it to her lips, took a deep breath, and then puffed out a sequence of spectral blue smoke rings, the last of which rolled into the shape of a heart before disappearing. Diana looked back over her shoulder, disapproving, and Amanda shrugged.

“Tastes about right, but they ain't real. Wouldn't want kissin’ me to be like cleaning an ashtray with your tongue.”

Diana winced a little at the suggestion.

“Smoking *and* vaping are both forbidden on school grounds.”

“You gonna rat me out then?” Amanda grinned. “Like to see ya explain that to ol’ Finneran. ‘Where and when did the alleged offence occur?’” The impersonation was uncomfortably accurate, and made Diana start for a moment. “‘In my study, after a period of strenuous and highly satisfactory love-making.’”

A pause. Amanda was certain she’d get a sharp response that would be as pleasing in its own way as when Diana had bitten her lower lip: harshly enough, almost, to draw blood. Instead, there was only a flicker of a pout, and Diana turned back towards the wall. The neat ridge of her spine was an enticing pathway though, and Amanda ran one finger down it, as far as the curve of her companion’s backside. Even a gentle flick at the start of the cleft was unrewarded with any response, however, causing Amanda to shrug and shift her attention to the book on the desk beside them.

“*Codex of Sappho.* Thought that was ‘Supervised Reference Only’.”

“It’s not from the library. It’s our family copy. Not that it really matters: none of the other students can read it.”

“It’s got pictures though.” She leafed through a few pages; some of the diagrams, carefully rendered in neat pen and ink, were alluringly familiar. “Guess it gives a whole new meaning to ‘filthy rich’. Back home, we just had ta make do with old copies of ‘Hot Witches’.” She sighed nostalgically. “Not that they’re even real witches. Mostly just pretty girls in pointy hats and fishnets. Brooms ain’t real either.” She closed the book with a thump and placed it back on the desk, and then slid back down onto the bed, slipping one arm around Diana’s waist and spooning against her. Was she a little surprised when Diana took her hand and pressed it to her stomach? A witch skilled in scrying might have divined the truth, but to anyone else Diana’s action was entirely opaque. “Did ya know you’ve been the number one requested centerfold for six months straight?” Amanda nuzzled her nose against the back of Diana’s neck. “I should getta picture right now. Might be worth somethin’.”

That finally got a response. Diana twisted around suddenly, “Don’t you dare even th…”

The smile, the hungry grin, caught her breath, and the lips pressed against hers choked off any further reproach.

At home, at least in the one of the many houses her family owned that Diana most thought of as home, there was a harp: mahogany and gold leaf. Magical or no, the skilled could draw such sounds from it: notes that danced through the hallways, up to her bedroom, and always made her studies a little easier. The curved wood of the instrument’s neck was like shoulders, falling gracefully to the small of the back and rising again to the hips: it was easy to imagine the soul of a young woman was trapped within it, stirring as slender fingers worked the strings.

Sometimes Diana imagined herself the harpist. And sometimes she wished to be the harp.

At that moment, among the mementos of her home, her desires were to be stroked and to sing. She let Amanda lead, content to allow her hands to rove where they would. A breast, squeezed

alternately softly and almost painfully hard. Ill-disciplined fingers stroked her stomach, soft from too much recent time in the library, and too little time on the playing fields or in the gym. And then the hand moved lower, the heel of Amanda's palm pressed between Diana's thighs, moving easily where she could feel herself becoming wet again. She shifted her hips a little, and each small motion brought more of her in contact: a crimson flower blossoming layer by layer. Amanda's fingers opened her like a lock, tripping the little levers of the mechanisms of desire deep within her. It was almost irresistible. She savored the fall of red hair across Amanda's face, the closed eyes with their short eyelashes, rough and boyish. The unexpected, unfamiliar look of concentration that Diana had never seen on her face before: not in any class, not even when she pulled herself down low onto her broom, urging the last iota of speed from it. And the regular, rhythmic rise and fall of her chest, each deep breath moving her breasts against Diana's own. It was almost irresistible, it was, almost. But it was time, time that was truly irresistible, and second by second they were exhausting it. In the Swiss carriage clock on her shelves the escapement rocked back and forth, nudging the gears onwards just as Amanda's fingers nudged Diana closer. *Tick* . Diana squeezed the dark bud of a nipple between thumb and finger. *Tick* . She brushed Amanda's hair aside and bit gently at exposed curve of one ear. *Tick* . She exercised her last, fraying piece of self-control, and rolled Amanda onto her back, straddling her and pinning her shoulders to the bed. There was little chance of victory in a straight-up wrestling match between the two of them, she knew, and she was surprised when Amanda offered no resistance.

"Nice ta have someone else take the lead for a change." Amanda looked up at her expectantly.

"Likewise." Diana tensed slightly, expecting an imminent counter from the girl beneath her. "But despite how enticing the prospect might be, we have little time for an encore performance."

"Ya sure about that?" Amanda brought her hand up, fingers slick.

Diana wanted to take the fingers in her mouth, to taste her own desire, but instead she grasped Amanda's hand, interlocking fingers with hers.

"One does not call the resolve of a Cavendish into question." She paused for a second, aware of the fragility of her determination, and then relaxed down onto Amanda, lying on her and letting her head nestle by Amanda's chin. Amanda shimmied against her a little, allowing their bodies to rub against one another from head to toe, and then stopped with a wry smile when Diana squeezed her hand uncomfortably hard.

"Ya know. When you cum you make this 'Nnnnnnnnn' noise. It's kinda adorable." She squeezed Diana's hand back in turn, but gently. "Diannnnnnnna Cavennnnnnnndish." With her free hand Amanda brushed the back of Diana's head and began to stroke her hair. "Guess you're not gonna be handling unicorns now. Or maybe it doesn't work like that…"

"*If a witch should lie with a man…* "

"Is that what ya call it? 'Lying with a man'?" Amanda snorted. "We just used to say, 'If you f… '"

She was surprised at the finger brought up to her lips.

"Don't spoil the moment."

"Sure." She let Diana nestle against her again. "Certain someone was gonna hear *me* at the end, before."

Diana shifted slightly, trying to rest her head against Amanda's shoulder.

"'Marceau's Silent Sphere'. No one could hear us, even if they were standing outside the door."

“That works both ways, don’t it? Didn’ya worry that the Pencil-necks would come in and we wouldn’t hear ’em?”

She had considered that. And the thought of Hannah or Barbara coming in, turning the corner of the little desk they shared, and finding her sprawled on her bed, Amanda’s head between her legs, had excited her so much that she’d clamped her thighs together with an abandon she’d been sure would break the other girl’s neck.

“Pencil-necks?”

“Hannah and Barbara. HB. Like the pencil. Handy. But not exactly exciting.” Amanda gave Diana’s hair one last stroke, and then shifted out from under her. “They give Akko too much shit.”

“She brings it on herself.”

“Yeah? Kid’s got spirit. Heart.”

“Women were burned at the stake to secure a future for magic: my ancestors among them. And she thinks only to trivialize it with light shows and cheap parlor tricks.”

Akko . Discussions about her always made Diana testy, but she didn’t want to end the evening with an argument.

“She wants to make people happy, Diana. Ain’t that the most important thing?”

Amanda let go of Diana’s hand and pulled herself up so she was sitting again.

“C’mon. Don’t ya like her? Just a bit?”

Amanda picked up the codex and leafed casually through the pages.

“Wouldn’t ya like to tutor her a little?” She gave Diana a wink and an entirely unwholesome grin.

“I suspect her star is orbiting Hanbridge Junior, at present.”

“Heh. Jealous, are ya?” The object of the mooted jealousy was left infuriatingly vague.

The effect of the Silent Sphere had dissipated, and beyond the room they could hear the muffled sounds of activity. Something like shouting which *might* have been Akko, and a quieter voice that was most likely Sucy. It was almost certainly something about mushrooms: it usually was. They all had their little quirks, the other girls, the skills where in one area at least, they might outshine Diana herself. Sucy with her potions, some of which terrified even Professor Lukić. Lotte with her company of faeries, talking easily with the spirits within objects like they were old friends. And Amanda with… she ran her a hand over Amanda’s stomach, walking fingers tip-tap on muscles and around her navel like they were skirting a lake. The portions at meals had certainly been smaller recently - the school’s finances were running low again, perhaps - but Amanda wasn’t skinny: she was lean, lean like an athlete. Didn’t some of the girls say that in her spare time she did kickboxing or something similarly far from the arcane?

Amanda looked thoughtfully at a page of the codex, keeping it infuriatingly out of Diana’s line of sight.

“Let’s try page twenty-five next time.”

“What makes you think there will be…”

The stream of words dried up, the last few drops evaporating under the sun of Amanda’s gaze. A slight, knowing smirk made the blood surge to Diana’s cheeks, but Amanda seemed content not to press the point.

“Almost beat ya, at the last broom trials.”

“If you say so.”

Amanda folded her arms in mock disapproval.

“Ya sayin’ my American magic ain’t as good as your English magic?”

“Your magic *is* my magic. English. Irish. Italian, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, German and some others, probably.”

“Yeah? Well, maybe I got some Si-Te-Cah in me too.” Amanda ran both hands through her hair, teasing it back into its usual rebellious mess.

“The red hair?” Diana smiled thoughtfully. “With a name like O’Neill, I think your origins are likely more local.” She let one hand rest below Amanda’s waist, and her little finger brushed lightly at the red curls. “No. Your magic is the magic of the Morrigan and Branwen. Aine and red-haired Brid.”

She’d had a habit of romanticizing the Celtic witches when she’d been younger, but then again, she’d romanticized many things as a child. It was strange how some of those feelings had persisted.

“But you would be faster than me,” she continued, returning to Amanda’s original remark, “if you concentrated more on technique, and less on playing to the crowd.”

“Which is more important to ya? Winnin’ or enjoyin’ life?”

“They’re one and the same.”

Diana felt the rise and slow fall of Amanda’s chest - a sigh - and closed her eyes. *Foolish* .

“Just when I think we’re understandin’ each other.”

Amanda swung her legs loosely off the bed, and then ran her hand - affectionately, but with slow sadness - from Diana’s neck, down between her breasts, to her stomach. She gave it a light pat.

“Gotta go. When the clock chimes, I’ll turn into a pumpkin.”

She reached for her clothes for a moment, then stopped, distracted by an object almost hidden behind the curtains.

“Shouldn’t that be in the store?”

“It’s something else from home.”

A broom in the traditional English style, something that had been popular twenty years ago or more. Indecipherable strokes and curves had been etched long ago into the seasoned wood of the handle. Letters; a name, perhaps: Diana’s mother, or maybe even her grandmother. It wasn’t the Shooting Star, but it would be a chance to ride a little piece of history, like driving a Bentley or Rolls. Joyriding on a classic.

“*Tia Freyre.* ”

The broom rose gently, and Amanda began to spin around it, effortlessly. Diana shook her head.

“You have real talent, and you’re going to squander it on broom dancing.”

Diana had seen this dance before, in the courtyard in front of the main buildings, watching from the windows above. Amanda had tumbled purposefully, as elegant as a *prima ballerina*, and the new intake of students had watched, slack-jawed, as the broom rose and fell, softly, like waves breaking on the shore, or branches bending in the autumn winds. Finally, the choreography had finished, Amanda stretching downwards, back arched, arms outstretched. Her skirt had begun to slide downwards, pale, freckled thighs revealed by inches… And then Professor Finneran had appeared and detentions had been handed out in a blizzard.

“Broom dancin’ has a long and illustrious history.”

A leg was lifted high, toes pointed, and as Amanda turned there was a flash of russet hair and pink that almost made Diana choke with

desire.

“Anyway. Whatcha goin’ to do when ya graduate?”

“I am heir to the house of Cavendish. I will continue the family traditions.”

The dance finished once again, and Amanda extended her arms towards Diana, fingertips just beyond reach.

“The old witches used ta steal kids in the night, in the stories.” Amanda waved her fingers rhythmically, daring Diana to take her hand. “Once we’ve graduated, let me steal ya.”

“I cannot. I have… responsibilities.”

“*Do what ye will.* ”

“*An it harm none, do what ye will,* ” Diana corrected.

“Would it hurt so much, if ya came with me?”

The figure was indistinct now, almost invisible in the low lights of the room. Her name might hold her there for seconds longer, no more; like clutching at the shifting features of a collapsing dream.

“*Amanda.* ” Diana remembered the worn leather and familiar smell of the book in her father’s study. “Your name is Latin.”

She shook her head and smiled.

“Nah. It’s Brooklyn.”

The broom turned slowly for a moment, and then clattered on the floor. A wisp of red hair spiraled upwards on a draught, making its own dance, paused, and fell, settling alongside. Without the warmth of the body beside her the room was now cold, and the ebb and flow of the green light from the distant tower brought Diana little warmth.

She pulled down her silk gown from beside the bed and slipped it on. It was a poor substitute for arms around her.

She replaced the broom behind the curtains, and then knelt where it had fallen. Diana rolled the lock of hair gently between her fingers. She concentrated.

“*Ex parte, totum.* ”

The lock blazed with light, and there was a brief sense of a figure in front of her; then the radiance faded and the hair turned to dust, dry like centuries. That was the extent of the power and life within it, then. The magic was spent.

There was a general injunction against invoking “Igraine’s Ethereal Assistant” within the school grounds; histories of Luna Nova were full of stories of capable students in centuries past who had evaded any chores, and in some cases entire years of study, by heaping them on their unfortunate doppelgangers. Those had been in the days of high magic, of course, and such a summoning was now beyond the skills of all but a few students and, Diana suspected, some of the staff.

Sow dragon’s teeth and beget an army. What was summoned could be fickle: dangerous, even. Better use something of yourself as a focus then; better use a length of your own hair, to invoke summoning like a mirror and make a duplicate that knew what you did, desired what you did, and would do your bidding without complaint. To summon another, to summon a friend or someone more than that? It could be done, with the hair of the one you wished to call; but to give some part of yourself was to give power over you, and such gifts were only bestowed on the most loyal - or the most loved.

In modern times, though, the students seemed to care little for such cautionary traditions. Giggling, they cut each other’s hair, copying the styles of actresses and idols they’d found in magazines, unless - like Amanda - they cut their own. And if someone observant were to

find a lock of red hair on the floor of one of the classrooms after break - well, that seemed to bother her not at all.

Diana knew her actions had been completely justified. She knew because she had justified them to herself continuously for the better part of a week after she had found the hair. She needed to prove her ability, of course, and what better way than to successfully invoke a summoning that hadn't been performed in more than half a century? And there was the matter of pride too, to exact some small measure of revenge for a barbed comment Amanda had thrown her way during Magical Pharmacology. There was nothing lurking at the back of her mind, no thought of being swept off her feet by a red-haired broom rider and rocketed into the air, upwards and upwards until she was dizzy from lack of oxygen and the arms wrapped tight around her; *that* she had thoroughly justified to herself too.

So she'd executed the summoning - perfectly, precisely - with a small portion of what she'd found, no more than a few strands. Her only mistake had been to keep hold of the hair. The duplicate Amanda had appeared close to her, almost on top of her, hand in hers, hot and alive and red.

"Whatcha want?"

The figure had forced her back into the bookcase, free hand thumping on the volumes above her, and Diana had only managed to stammer a flustered response.

"My… my room has become untidy. You… you're to clean it."

Amanda had grinned, the wolfish grin of the *real* Amanda.

"Sure. Anything ya want."

"Within reason, of course," Diana had tried to counter, suddenly wishing not to appear too entitled. Amanda was close, very close, and her scent - surely only the cheapest deodorant from the corner

shop in town - made the blood rush to Diana’s cheeks and her head spin.

This wolf had human form. Its appetites were human too.

“Shame. I was hopin’ you’d ask for somethin’ unreasonable.”

Half the buttons of her shirt were undone, almost before Diana had time to realize.

“What are you doing!?”

“Well, get ’em off. Can’t wash yer clothes with you in ’em.”

“There’s no need to…”

A hand had snaked under her shirt, unclasping her bra and then moving to the front, pushing it smoothly up over her breasts. As the fabric brushed her nipples, Diana’s legs had almost given way. The other hand ran up her thigh, from the knee, lifting her skirt up to her waist. One long finger had pressed lightly against her through the satin of her underwear.

“Did ya spill somethin’?” The finger had begun to circle slowly on the fabric. “It feels…”

The magic had dissipated. She was alone in her study.

A week. A week of sketchy attention during classes, the view out over the playing fields and distant forests suddenly attractive. A week of avoiding Amanda in the corridors - because Diana was certain, somehow, that she would know, she would *know* . That the spectral Amanda would return and whisper secrets to her in the night. A week, and the magnetic attraction of the remaining lock of red hair had proved beyond her.

It was broadly accepted in Luna Nova that Amanda was as skilled in breaking hearts as she was in breaking rules. A sudden, overflowing, post bag of letters with Appleton postmarks suggested as much,

though she'd been gleeful in making a bonfire out of them. Whereas Diana was somewhat *lacking*… No, she was content to be honest; she was uninformed in such matters. Aware of the theory, certainly, but aside from a "marriage" - aged six - to a local tomboy which had been consummated with a kiss on the cheek, a boiled sweet, and a weekend of disapproval from her parents, she was lacking in any practical experience of note. And since *Igraine's Assistant* was no more knowledgeable than its summoner, as capable or ignorant as she herself was…

She'd had the codex sent from home, the same day. Bookwork was better than no work at all.

"Page twenty-five…" So close to the preface, it was unlikely to be anything particularly demanding.

A full-page figure, two women lying together in what appeared to be a decorative, and completely unnecessary, bed of flowers. Unusually for the volume, they were fully clothed, in a style the illustrator had estimated was something suitably classical, most likely Roman or Greek, or a Victorian interpretation thereof. They were holding hands. They were sleeping.

They seemed content.

So *that* was what she was searching for.

The Amanda she'd summoned… Diana couldn't tell whether her desires were Amanda's, or what she thought - she perhaps hoped - Amanda felt, or her own. She closed the codex and placed it carefully back in the bookcase, up on the top shelf where it wouldn't draw attention.

Then she dimmed the lamps completely, and went to the window, pushing the curtains aside. Lights from the buildings across the quadrangle were clearly visible: from the library, and from the block where the staff had their rooms. Professor Ursula was on duty that night, and as such there would probably be story-telling in the

studies and general mischief until midnight, at least. She meant well, but she had little authority, Diana reflected.

“Amaaaaaaaaan-daaaaaaaaaaaa…” From beside the window, where Diana now stood, Akko’s voice, drifting up from the lower floors, was clear in its complaint. In response, there was a familiar laugh that gave Diana goosebumps, driving up the hairs on her arms like waving grasses. It wasn’t the arrogant, cocksure laugh that she knew from class; it was the laugh she’d heard that evening, overflowing with warmth and friendship. She strained to hear any words, but there was only a murmur, the vague shape of syllables, and nothing she could make out.

“Diana…”

She remembered the lips by her ear, breath hot and ragged, coming in bursts like blasts from a furnace. She cooled her fingertips on the glass for a second, and then slipped her hand inside her robe, stroking a breast as gently as she dared. Her eyelids fluttered closed, beyond her control, as a cold nail dragged across one nipple, and then her hand edged lower. She let it move as Amanda had moved, discarding shyness, discarding decorum, giving herself over to the sensation of heat as her fingers slipped inside her. As she moved faster, teasing herself with her thumb, the memory became faceted, perfect: Amanda’s weight on top of her, her scent, the red-orange of her hair, and the sound of her voice.

“My rose,” she’d said, as she kissed down from Diana’s belly. “My English rose,” and Amanda’s tongue had moved her petals, as lightly as a breeze.

“Nnnnnnnn…” Diana let the shameful sound escape her lips. “Amannnnnnnnda…” She jerked forward, her head pressing against the cold glass of the window. She felt cool, sobering air across her belly and thighs where her robe opened.

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.

Amanda’s hair was growing straggly again. Unkempt. She’d probably try cutting it herself: probably in the changing rooms.

Love is the law. Love under will.

It was something worth considering.

The moon has set

And the Pleiades.

Midnight.

I lie in bed alone.

- Sappho